

# **The Old Hickory Bulletin**

## **Old Hickory Church of Christ**

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### **Understanding the Sovereignty of God**

God speaking through the great prophet Isaiah said, "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me" (Isa. 46:9). God declared His uniqueness among all beings in the universe in this verse. However, He went further and said, "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (v. 10). It is here that God affirmed His sovereignty. God knows the future because He plans the future and accomplishes it. He could only do this if He is sovereign over all things.

Sovereignty means that God, as the ruler of the Universe, possesses supreme power and authority so that He is in complete control and can accomplish whatever He pleases. Further, all things are under His control, and nothing happens without His direction or permission. The psalmist also said, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him" (Psa. 115:3 NIV). In the great Book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar said, "All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Dan. 4:35 NIV).

One of the problems today is, that many do not affirm the sovereignty of God because they think that if God is sovereign then man does not have free will. The Bible clearly affirms the sovereignty of God in many wonderful passages, and they are crystal clear that His sovereignty is fundamental to His very nature. Further, the Bible speaks of God's sovereignty and that He deserves to be praised for it: "He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen." (I Timothy 6:15-16).

However, some have concluded that God determined, before the foundations of the world came into existence, that He would arbitrarily save some people and condemn all others to be lost eternally. This doctrine is not taught in the Scriptures. Many passages show that God has given free will to all, and that one can choose to be saved or to be lost. For an example, consider the people of Jerusalem as Jesus mourned over them: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34). In this example, Jesus mourned over the people of Jerusalem not choosing to come to Him. He speaks of how often He "would" have accepted them if they would just repent, and He also states that the reason they did not, was because they "would not" come to Him. It was not that they could not, but they would not. Both in our language and the original Greek, this word (*thelo*) implies purpose, determination, and will, and it is the same word used earlier in the verse to describe Christ's will that they be saved. This verse seems to clearly indicate that these people had the ability (free will) to choose to come to Christ, but they willed not to come. Either the truth is to be found in the Scriptures or in the doctrine of predestination? I choose to believe the Scriptures, don't you?

Another example is found regarding Jonah and the Ninevites (Jonah 3:4-10). Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh and warned them that God had judged them and would destroy them and their city. This fate was decreed without exception. However, the people repented hoping that God might change His determined course. God did change His course of action and spared the city. Therefore, if all things are predestined, was God lying when He spoke concerning their destruction, or did He respond to their penitence and change His mind concerning their destruction? How could He have "repented" or "turned", if His course was chosen and settled before time began? Here again we see people who had the power or right to change their minds and repent of their sins, therefore, free will.

The Bible clearly teaches that God wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. In 2 Peter 3:9 – The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Titus 2:11 teaches that "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." Note that God's grace brings to all "salvation." Hebrews 2:9 – By the grace of God Jesus tasted death for everyone. This "everyone" refers to those who are subject to the fear of death (v15), which is every human. John 3:16 – "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Note that the ones Jesus died to save are all those in the world whom God loves. He loves even His enemies (Matt. 5:43-48).

Yes, God is sovereign over all things, but gave human beings the free will to choose salvation or damnation. What is the application concerning the Sovereignty of God? We should surrender everything we are and all that we have to Him Who rules the world. Is there anything you have not surrendered to the Almighty God?

- Guy Roberson

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## **“It’s My Life and I’ll Do What I Want with It!”**

Rather a bold, confrontational, in your face kind of statement isn't it? Generally, it is made by individuals who try to defend their life style when it is called into question.

However, the concept of the statement is a Biblical one. Consider with me the statement found in Psalms 119:109 — "My life is continually in my hand, yet, I do not forget Your law!" The inspired writer points out a truism of life. An individual, unless intellectually impaired by disease, accident, or birth defect, has total control over the course of life he chooses to take.

Notice the writer says that it is continually in our hands or control. The word "continually" is defined by W. E. Vine as "Always, continually, regularly." There are no exceptions. Consequently, it takes away all excuses for bad behavior. It is not our parent's fault, our sibling's fault, our friend's fault, our teacher's fault, or the local church's fault. It means we are not a victim when we exhibit bad behavior.

In Job 14:1, we are told "Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil." Everyone has problems — even Jesus did. In Ecclesiastes 9:11, we are told that "time and chance" happen to all men. The best qualified does not always win, the righteous are not always treated fairly, and the unrighteous sometimes get what they don't deserve. Life is not fair, Satan will see to that.

In the 73rd Psalm, Asaph said that as he pondered the unfairness of life it troubled his mind to the point of discouragement. He said he almost turned his back upon God until he came to the realization that both the righteous and the unrighteous are going to die. He realized it was at death that God would resolve the matter. It was at death the righteous would enter into eternity with God and the unrighteous would enter eternity without God.

God has never promised His children a life free from problems. He has, however, promised us how to deal with any problem we face in life. Peter reveals to us in 2 Peter 1:3 that in the word of God, we have "everything pertaining to life and godliness." God

gives us direction to deal with life. The difficulties that come into our lives provide an opportunity to demonstrate how genuine our faith and love for God really is — "So then, you will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:20). But with every difficulty that we face in life, God will provide a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).

We will all face God on the day of judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10). It is at that time our eternal destiny will be determined by whether or not we remembered and applied God's law to our life while in the flesh.

- Dick Milwee

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## It Needs No Change

The men who wrote the Constitution of the United States have long been praised for their wisdom and foresight. The words they penned have served as the basis for the laws of this land for over 200 years, and have needed relatively few changes or additions. This is indeed remarkable when we view the governments and laws of most other nations in a constant state of change.

Far more amazing than this, is the law of Christ. Written nearly 2000 years ago, it continues today to provide us with "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). It is a "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). No change has ever been, or ever will be needed in it. Its own pages contain warnings to those who would attempt to alter its commands (Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9,10; Revelation 22:18,19). Let us learn to appreciate the beauty and perfection of God's word, and strive to live and worship according to its precepts.

- Greg Gwin

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- > "Beware of a half-truth because you may have gotten hold of the wrong half!"
  - > "Be sure to hold your temper because no one else wants it!"
  - > "Make the Word of God your daily bread; not cake for special occasions!"
  - > "Bad habits are first cobwebs, then strong cables!"
  - > "You cannot walk by faith unless you are directed by the word of God!"
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**THIS WEEK'S LESSONS:** Sunday morning: "Question Box: Does the Bible say anything about body piercing and tattooing?" (Text: 1 Thess. 5:21-22); Sunday evening: "Jesus' First Converts!" #2 (Text: John 1:35-51).